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ABSTRACT

In this picture story, a woman describes her family's migration from the Portuguese island of Madeira to Hawaii and the process of acculturation that she and her family went through while retaining aspects of their cultural background. Many photographs are included. (EB)

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From Madeira to the Sandwich Islands

THE STORY OF A PORTUGUESE FAMILY IN HAWAII

It was a happy occasion
to wed to Margaret F. Medeiros

My name is Anna Martins Gouveia (go-VEY-ah).

I was born in 1880 on the Portuguese island of **Madeira** (ma-DAY-rra) far away from Hawaii. Most of the Portuguese people in Hawaii, which was then called the Sandwich Islands, came from Madeira or from the **Açores** (ah-SORR-rheys), a group of islands near Madeira.

There were mountains and valleys in Madeira just like in Hawaii.

We had a pig and a cow, and we grew beans, sugarcane, bananas, vegetables, flowers and grapes to make wine.
After church on Sundays,
everybody would relax and visit his family and neighbors.

On holidays or on religious feast days, we would dress up in
festa (FESH-ta) clothes for dancing and singing, and everybody would enjoy the special festa foods and sweets.

But during the week my husband Francisco and I had to work long hours to raise our three little children,
Manuel, Mary, and Caroline.

I took care of the house and did the cooking, baking,
and sewing. Sometimes I helped Francisco with his work in the fields.
There were many things we needed that we could not make or
grow ourselves, like shoes or cloth.

So Francisco used to pack a bag of beans on his back
and leave before daylight to walk over the mountains. The market at
Funchal (foon-SHAHL) was on the other side of the island. The next morning
he would sell the beans and then walk back with the
money he had earned and sometimes with goods he had bought, arriving
home after dark.

From our friends who worked on sailing ships,
we heard stories about a group of islands far away that was just like Madeira.

We read letters from Portuguese families who settled there.
They all said there were good jobs
and lots of land you could buy, that it was green, rich, and good.
They said that people wanted Portuguese families to
settle there to work and make Hawaii grow. Francisco and I listened
to these stories, but we never thought we would leave Madeira. One day,
everything changed.

It was late afternoon and I didn't expect Francisco
back from Funchal until after dark.
I remember that I was up in the fig tree in front of our house picking
figs for the children when Francisco returned, upset
and angry.

He said that when he arrived at the market to sell his beans,
a man told him that they already had
all the beans they needed and would not buy any more.
All his work for nothing! Francisco said that he threw down his bag of
beans and went straight to the immigration agent and signed up
for the next boat to Hawaii! I didn't want to leave Madeira
and our friends and family, but he said, "If you want to stay, then stay. But
I'm going!"

He was my husband, the father of my children and the head of
our family, and he had made his decision. So we packed up and left.

I remember it was the summer of 1906 when we left on the
little ship called the *Suveric* with other families from Madeira and the Açores.
The ship was crowded with 616 children and 710 adults.
We worried most about the children because
in a small ship there was no place to play and they became restless and got sick easily. We took turns eating and sleeping.

The food wasn't too bad; we had beans, soup, hard bread,
and some meat and fish.
But I remember that there were some rascals on board who were unhappy with the food so they used to throw it overboard. Not only their share,
but ours too! A shame they were from Madeira. Finally, we had to chain
them like prisoners for the rest of the trip.
When we arrived in Hawaii, these rascals were sent back to Madeira on the next boat. I often think about what
happened to them when they got back to their homes!

Our voyage was more than sixty days,
but it took families who came on earlier sailing ships over three months
to reach Hawaii.

The trip was difficult and dangerous, especially
when we came through the Straits of Magellan at the stormy
tip of South America.

We prayed that God and His saints would help and guide us through the
voyage. Like many others during that difficult trip,
I prayed that we had made the right decision to leave Madeira,
our dear families, all our friends and go
half way around the world to another group of islands
we had never seen.

We were used to working hard in the old country and we worked hard in Hawaii too.
Francisco was assigned to a job as a laborer for twenty-four dollars a month. It was at Lihue Sugar Plantation on the island of Kauai.

We worked long hours for six days a week, but we thought the pay was good. We also had the use of a house and some land to grow what we wanted. I planted flowers and a little vegetable garden like I had in Madeira and took my turn baking bread in the f**rno** (FOOR-nu), a brick oven, in the plantation camp.

Francisco wanted the boys to learn a trade when they were young so that they could earn good money to support a wife and children later. Portuguese children always started to work early to help their parents support the big families of those days.
People would say to a growing boy, "Well, look how big and strong you're getting, young man. Pretty soon you can start working and bring in some money to help your mother and father."

We wanted a better life for our family which had grown to three boys and five girls.
So I taught my girls to cook, sew and keep a clean house. And I made sure that my family went to church to practice their Catholic religion.

And we wanted our children to get as much education
as they could.
It was important that they learn to speak and
write English which was the language of our new country
so we sent them to the government school
on the plantation.

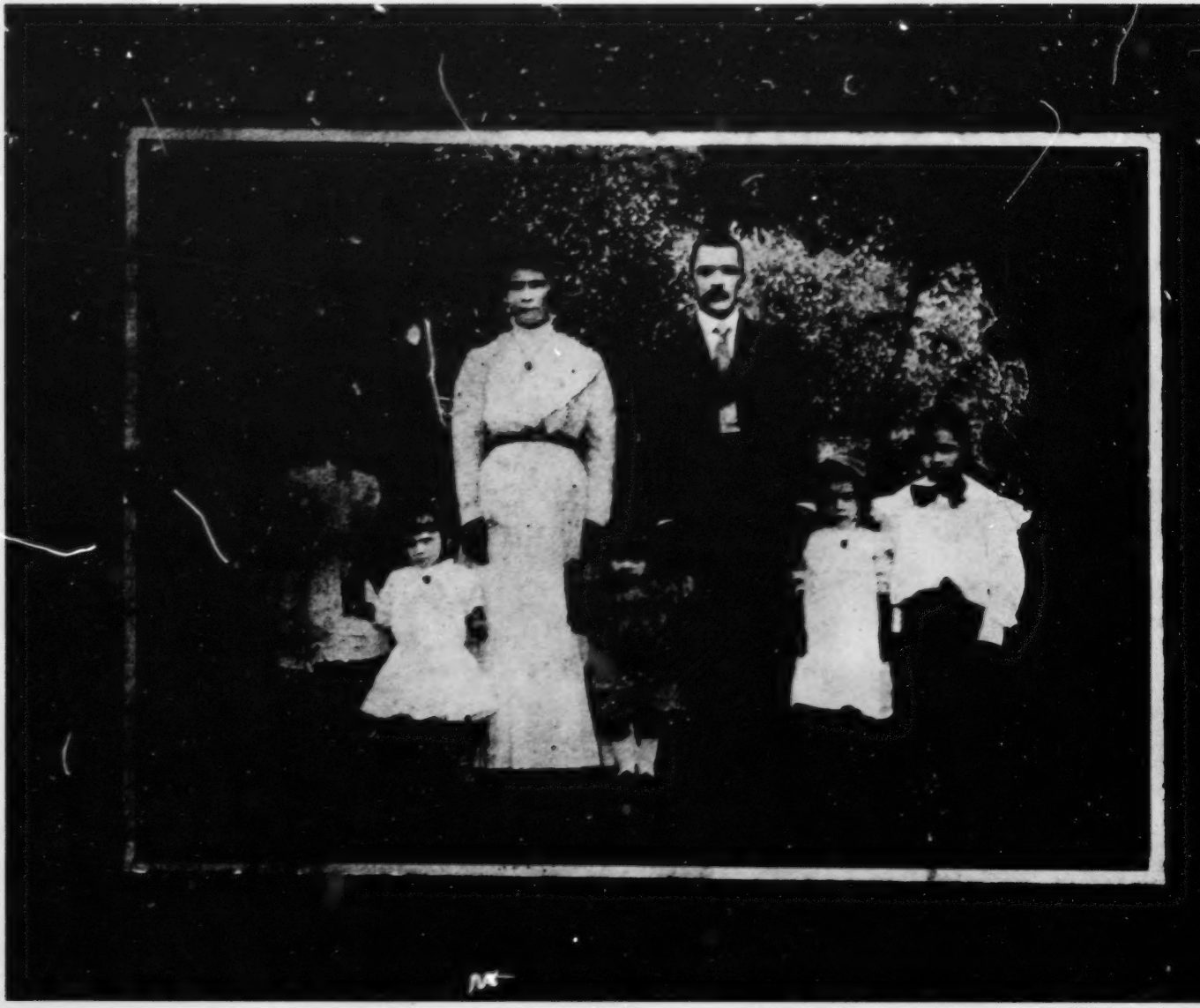
Their friends came from families living in the plantation camps —
the Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino families
as well as the Portuguese.

We learned to work and live with many nationalities who spoke
different languages, ate different foods,
and had different ways.

I helped bring in extra money by sewing and embroidering for the plantation managers and school teachers.
We raised a few cows and some chickens for our own use and sold milk and eggs to the people who lived on the plantation.

In 1918, when we had saved enough money,
Francisco quit his job on the plantation. Our older children wanted the family to move to California
because many other Portuguese families were already there.

But there was a long waiting list for the ships
and Francisco was offered a job paying three dollars a day as a stone mason so we stayed in Honolulu.



We saved until we could buy a big house here in Kapahulu.

The man who sold us the property said the house should be torn down, but Francisco repaired it and we lived in that house for thirty years until we moved into this smaller house that Francisco built. He also cleared the land of **kiawe** (key-AH-vay) trees and large rocks. He spent months chiseling the rocks to the right size to build a stone wall just as he had learned to do in Madeira.

Again, I planted flowers and a vegetable garden.
We always had a cow so that the family could have fresh milk.
And we raised chickens for their eggs. This was the only way we could afford to feed our large family.

In addition to Manuel, Mary, and Caroline, who
came with us from Madeira, we had
Theresa, Joseph, Anna, Frank, Philomena, Beatrice, Louisa, Olivia, and Stanley,
a total of four sons and eight daughters.

Mary was studying to be a teacher, and Caroline was a cashier
in a department store downtown.
I was so proud of my oldest son Manuel, who was working as an apprentice
machinist and learning a trade. I remember taking him
to start his first saving account at the bank. It was 1919.
He was earning five dollars a week and out of that he saved fifty cents.

Francisco and the three oldest children became citizens of the United States.
But I never had the time to sit down and learn to read and
write English well enough to take the tests.

Our family was happy in Kapahulu. We were close to the church and we all went to Mass and the Sacraments.
The children grew up good Catholics. We took them to the church processions and feasts, but we also went to the Portuguese community celebrations. We went to the **chamarrita** (sha-ma-RRHEE-ta) dances and the Holy Ghost feasts with the processions, the games, the music and the costumes of the old country. I made Portuguese doughnuts called **malassadas** (ma-la-SAH-dahs) every Shrove Tuesday. We ate Portuguese food like **vinha d'alhos** (veen-ya-DAHL-yous) and Portuguese bean soup with thick slabs of homemade bread.

On Kauai, I shared a furno with others in the plantation camp to make our bread.
But in Kapahulu, Francisco and his friends built a furno for me in our own yard. Many Portuguese homes had furnos in the back yard to make the bread we ate everyday and to roast meat and fish.

On special days, like Easter and Christmas, we used to make the sweet golden bread called **pão dôce** (pown-DOH-see) that sometimes had unshelled whole eggs hidden inside as a surprise for the children.

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Two or three times a week, I used to bake about ten loaves in our oven, each loaf weighing around two and one half pounds!
It was no easy matter, either. My sons and daughters took turns helping me. We had to knead the dough, get the fire started with twigs and wood, sprinkle flour on the floor of the furno to check the temperature, and clean the oven when the heat was just right. We used long wooden paddles to put in and slide out the loaves.

Today, we buy our bread from the grocery store but you just can't compare it with the bread we used to bake in that oven.
I can still smell the aroma of those hot, golden loaves. You could smell it throughout the neighborhood!

Our children are all married now, mostly to Portuguese or part-Portuguese. Francisco and I used to worry that maybe our children would marry people who weren't Portuguese, wouldn't understand our background and customs or want to be a part of our close family. And we knew that different backgrounds, customs, languages and especially different religions would make it even harder to adjust in marriage.

But I see my grandchildren marrying other nationalities and other races. I guess it's okay, because nowadays everybody is so Americanized that there's hardly any difference now. The main thing is that they have good marriages and good families. Only three out of my forty-four grandchildren married pure Portuguese. So far, all the marriages have been good.

When my first great-great grandchild was born we took a picture of all five generations.
How proud Francisco would have been to be a part of that picture! But he died just a few years ago, at the age of ninety-three.

I don't get around much at my age anymore. I say my Rosary, praying for Francisco, for our family and the people in the whole world. I think about the old days, and the life we had, about the hard work and about the joys.

Oh, I'm really not alone. Theresa lives next door, Olivia stays with me during the day and I spend Sundays at Mary's house in Kaneohe.

And everyone comes to visit and chat for a while, sometimes even my children from the mainland, like my son Manuel.

Thanks be to God, they're all well and healthy and Francisco and I are proud of them, each and every one.

MAY 7 1979

Glossary

Açores The Portuguese island group located in the Atlantic Ocean west of Lisbon, Portugal.

chamarrita A Portuguese folk dance.

festa A time for merry-making; a party, religious feast.

Funchal The capital city of Madeira located on the island of Madeira.

furno Oven. Home ovens were made of brick, mortar and earth, usually built outdoors but occasionally – as in the "old country"– built in the kitchen wall with doors opening both to the inside and to the outdoors.

Holy Ghost Feast A grand three-day celebration ending seven weeks of festivities after Easter.

kiawe A tree that can grow where there is very little rain. Its spreading branches hold tiny leaves and thorns. In the summer months it grows long yellow beans that are used to feed cattle and horses.

Madeira The largest island of the Madeira island group, located in the Atlantic Ocean 500 miles southwest of Lisbon.

malassadas Sweet doughnuts dusted with sugar or rolled in honey.

pão dôce Sweet bread rich in sugar, eggs and butter.

Shrove Tuesday The day before Ash Wednesday. Traditionally the day to use up all sweets before the solemn Lenten season.

vinha d'alhos A marinade for meats and fish made of vinegar, oil bay leaf, garlic and chili peppers.

Photography by Edward Greevy

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On the cover: Linen embroidered by Anna when she was a little girl. Her mother had made the cloth by growing, harvesting, and making the flax into threads and spinning the cloth on her wheel.